

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEBRASKA

AUSTIN MATHIASSEN,

Petitioner,

vs.

ROB JEFFREYS,

Respondent.

8:25CV297

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

This matter is before the Court on preliminary review of Petitioner Austin Mathiasen's Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus, Filing No. 1, brought pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. The purpose of this review is to determine whether Petitioner's claims, when liberally construed, are potentially cognizable in federal court. Condensed and summarized for clarity, Petitioner's claims are:

Claim One: Petitioner's appellate counsel was ineffective for failing to raise trial counsel's ineffectiveness in not advising Petitioner to accept a plea offer.

Claim Two: Petitioner's appellate counsel was ineffective for failing to raise trial counsel's ineffectiveness for advising Petitioner to waive recusal of the trial judge.

The Court determines that these claims, when liberally construed, are potentially cognizable in federal court. However, the Court cautions Petitioner that no determination has been made regarding the merits of these

claims or any defenses to them or whether there are procedural bars that will prevent Petitioner from obtaining the relief sought.

Petitioner also has filed a motion for appointment of counsel due to his lack of legal training. Filing No. 4. “[T]here is neither a constitutional nor statutory right to counsel in habeas proceedings; instead, [appointment] is committed to the discretion of the trial court.” *McCall v. Benson*, 114 F.3d 754, 756 (8th Cir. 1997). As a general rule, counsel will not be appointed unless the case is unusually complex or the petitioner’s ability to investigate and articulate the claims is unusually impaired or an evidentiary hearing is required. *See, e.g., Wiseman v. Wachendorf*, 984 F.3d 649, 655 (8th Cir. 2021); *Morris v. Dormire*, 217 F.3d 556, 558–59 (8th Cir. 2000), *cert. denied*, 531 U.S. 984 (2000); *Hoggard v. Purkett*, 29 F.3d 469, 471 (8th Cir. 1994). *See also* Rule 8(c) of the *Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts* (requiring appointment of counsel if an evidentiary hearing is warranted).

After careful review of the record, the Court finds there is no need for the appointment of counsel at this early stage in the proceedings. Petitioner’s lack of legal training does not distinguish him from the vast majority of pro se inmate litigants. *See Recca v. Omaha Police Dep’t*, 859 F. App’x 3, 5 (8th Cir. 2021) (“As a prisoner, Recca understandably faced challenges representing himself, but ‘most indigent prisoners will face similar challenges.’”) (quoting *Patterson v. Kelley*, 902 F.3d 845, 850 (8th Cir. 2018)). The Court is, however, aware that this situation may change as litigation progresses. As the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals instructs, the Court will “continue to be alert to the possibility that, because of procedural complexities or other reasons, later developments in the case may show either that counsel should be appointed, or that strict procedural

requirements should, in fairness, be relaxed to some degree.” *Williams v. Carter*, 10 F.3d 563, 567 (8th Cir. 1993).

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that:

1. Upon initial review of the habeas corpus petition, Filing No. 1, the Court preliminarily determines that Petitioner’s claims, as they are set forth in this Memorandum and Order, are potentially cognizable in federal court.

2. Petitioner’s motion for appointment of counsel, Filing No. 4, is denied without prejudice to reassertion.

3. By **June 20, 2025**, Respondent must file a motion for summary judgment or state court records in support of an answer. The Clerk of the Court is directed to set a pro se case management deadline in this case using the following text: **June 20, 2025**: deadline for Respondent to file state court records in support of answer or motion for summary judgment.

4. If Respondent elects to file a motion for summary judgment, the following procedures must be followed by Respondent and Petitioner:

- A. The motion for summary judgment must be accompanied by a separate brief, submitted at the time the motion is filed.
- B. The motion for summary judgment must be supported by any state court records that are necessary to support the motion. Those records must be contained in a separate filing entitled: “Designation of State Court Records in Support of Motion for Summary Judgment.”
- C. Copies of the motion for summary judgment, the designation, including state court records, and Respondent’s brief must be served on Petitioner *except* that

Respondent is only required to provide Petitioner with a copy of the specific pages of the record that are cited in Respondent's motion and brief. In the event that the designation of state court records is deemed insufficient by Petitioner or Petitioner needs additional records from the designation, Petitioner may file a motion with the Court requesting additional documents. Such motion must set forth the documents requested and the reasons the documents are relevant to the cognizable claims.

- D. No later than 30 days following the filing of the motion for summary judgment, Petitioner must file and serve a brief in opposition to the motion for summary judgment. Petitioner may not submit other documents unless directed to do so by the Court.
- E. No later than 30 days after Petitioner's brief is filed, Respondent must file and serve a reply brief. In the event that Respondent elects not to file a reply brief, he should inform the Court by filing a notice stating that he will not file a reply brief and that the motion is therefore fully submitted for decision.
- F. If the motion for summary judgment is denied, Respondent must file an answer, a designation and a brief that complies with terms of this order. *See* the following paragraph. The documents must be filed no later than 30 days after the denial of the motion for summary judgment. **Respondent is warned that failure to file an answer, a designation and a brief in a timely fashion may**

result in the imposition of sanctions, including Petitioner's release.

5. If Respondent elects to file an answer, the following procedures must be followed by Respondent and Petitioner:

- A. By **June 20, 2025**, Respondent must file all state court records that are relevant to the cognizable claims. *See, e.g.*, Rule 5(c)-(d) of the *Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts*. Those records must be contained in a separate filing entitled: "Designation of State Court Records in Support of Answer."
- B. No later than 30 days after the relevant state court records are filed, Respondent must file an answer. The answer must be accompanied by a separate brief, submitted at the time the answer is filed. Both the answer and the brief must address all matters germane to the case including, but not limited to, the merits of Petitioner's allegations that have survived initial review, and whether any claim is barred by a failure to exhaust state remedies, a procedural bar, non-retroactivity, a statute of limitations, or because the petition is an unauthorized second or successive petition. *See, e.g.*, Rules 5(b) and 9 of the *Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts*.
- C. Copies of the answer, the designation, and Respondent's brief must be served on Petitioner at the time they are filed with the Court *except* that Respondent is only required to provide Petitioner with a copy of the specific pages of the designated record that are cited in Respondent's answer

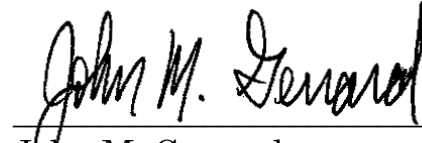
and brief. In the event that the designation of state court records is deemed insufficient by Petitioner or Petitioner needs additional records from the designation, Petitioner may file a motion with the Court requesting additional documents. Such motion must set forth the documents requested and the reasons the documents are relevant to the cognizable claims.

- D. No later than 30 days after Respondent's brief is filed, Petitioner must file and serve a brief in response. Petitioner must not submit any other documents unless directed to do so by the Court.
- E. No later than 30 days after Petitioner's brief is filed, Respondent must file and serve a reply brief. In the event that Respondent elects not to file a reply brief, he should inform the Court by filing a notice stating that he will not file a reply brief and that the merits of the petition are therefore fully submitted for decision.
- F. The Clerk of the Court is directed to set a pro se case management deadline in this case using the following text:
July 21, 2025: check for Respondent's answer and separate brief.

6. No discovery shall be undertaken without leave of the Court. *See Rule 6 of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases in the United States District Courts.*

Dated this 5th day of May, 2025.

BY THE COURT:



John M. Gerrard
Senior United States District Judge